



**United States Department of Justice
United States Attorney's Office
District of Minnesota**

**B. Todd Jones,
United States Attorney**

**Jeanne F. Cooney
Director of Community Relations
(612) 664-5611
email: jeanne.cooney@usdoj.gov**

News Release

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Side Lake man pleads guilty to growing more than 1,000 marijuana plants

A 49-year-old Side Lake man pleaded guilty today in federal court to growing more than 1,000 marijuana plants on his property. Appearing before United States District Court Judge Richard Kyle in Duluth, Thorsten Gorham Otterness pleaded guilty to one count of manufacturing 1,000 or more marijuana plants. Otterness was indicted on September 23, 2009.

In his plea agreement, Otterness admitted growing 1,339 plants in a field adjacent to his residence from the summer of 2009 through September 10, 2009, and admitted he intended to harvest the marijuana to sell it.

Officers from the Boundary Waters Drug Task Force executed a state search warrant at Otterness's residence after police observed the marijuana from air on Sept. 10. He was arrested.

Otterness faces a potential maximum penalty of life in prison for his crime. Judge Kyle will determine his sentence at a future date. This case is the result of an investigation by the Boundary Waters Drug Task Force and the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas M. Hollenhorst.